

# Ibn al-Baytar

**Diyā' al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Mālaqī**, commonly known as **Ibn al-Bayṭār** (Arabic: ابن البيطار) (1197–1248 AD) was an [Andalusian](#)<sup>[1]</sup> [Arab](#)<sup>[2]</sup> physician, botanist, pharmacist and scientist. His main contribution was to systematically record the additions made by [Islamic physicians in the Middle Ages](#), which added between 300 and 400 types of medicine to the one thousand previously known since antiquity. He was a student of [Abu al-Abbas al-Nabati](#).<sup>[3]</sup>

## Life

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Ibn al-Baitar was born in the city of [Málaga](#) in [al-Andalus](#) (Muslim Spain) at the end of the twelfth century, hence his *nisba* "al-Mālaqī".<sup>[1]</sup> His name "Ibn al-Baitar" is Arabic for "son of the veterinarian", which was his father's profession.<sup>[4][5]</sup> Ibn al-Bayṭār learned botany from the Málagan botanist [Abū al-'Abbās al-Nabātī](#) with whom he started collecting plants in and around Spain.<sup>[6]</sup>

In 1219, Ibn al-Bayṭār left Málaga, travelling to the coast of North Africa and as far as Anatolia, to collect plants. The major stations he visited include [Marrakech](#), [Bugia](#), [Constantinople](#), [Tunis](#), [Tripoli](#), [Barqa](#) and [Antalya](#).

After 1224, he entered the service of the [Ayyubid](#) Sultan [al-Kāmil](#) and was appointed chief herbalist. In 1227 al-Kāmil extended his domination to Damascus, and Ibn al-Bayṭār accompanied him there, which provided him an opportunity to collect plants in Syria. His botanical researches extended over a vast area including Arabia and Palestine. He died in Damascus in 1248.<sup>[1]</sup>

Ibn al-Bayṭār used the name "snow of China" (in Arabic, *thalj al-Şīn*) to describe [saltpetre](#) while writing about gunpowder.<sup>[7][8]</sup>

Works

Kitāb al-Jāmi‘ li-Mufradāt al-Adwiya wa-l-Aghdhiya



Copy of Ibn al-Baytar's *Kitab al-jami' li-mufradat al-adwiyah wa'l-aghddhiyah*, Near East, dated c. 1300

Ibn al-Bayṭār's largest and most widely read book is his *Compendium on Simple Medicaments and Foods* (Arabic: كتاب الجامع لمفردات الأدوية والأغذية<sup>[3]</sup>). It is a pharmacopoeia (pharmaceutical encyclopedia) listing 1400 plants, foods, and drugs, and their uses. It is organized alphabetically by the name of the useful plant or plant component or other substance—a small minority of the items covered are not botanicals. For each item, Ibn al-Bayṭār makes one or two brief remarks himself and gives brief extracts from a handful of different earlier authors about the item. The bulk of the information is compiled from the earlier authors. The book contains references to 150 previous Arabic authors, as well as 20 previous Greek authors.<sup>[9][10]</sup> One of the sources he quotes most frequently is the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides who was inspired by Magon, another Amazigh, having also written an Arabic commentary on the work.<sup>[11]</sup> Another book often cited by him is Book Two of the *Canon of Medicine* of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna). Both of those sources have similarities in layout and subject matter with Ibn al-Bayṭār's own book, but Ibn al-Bayṭār's treatments are richer in detail, and a large minority of Ibn al-Bayṭār's useful plants or plant substances are not covered at all by Dioscorides or Ibn Sīnā. In modern printed edition, the book is more than 900 pages long.

Ibn al-Bayṭār



Statue of Ibn al-Bayṭār in Benalmádena Costa, Spain

Born	1197 Málaga, Andalusia, Almohad Caliphate, now Province of Málaga, Spain
Died	1248 (aged 51) Damascus, Ayyubid dynasty, now Syria
Known for	Scientific classification Oncology
Scientific career	
Fields	Botanist, Scientist, Pharmacist, Physician

As well as in Arabic, it was published in full in translation in German and French in the 19th century.<sup>[12]</sup>

Ibn al-Bayṭār provides detailed chemical information on the [Rosewater](#) and Orangewater production. He mentions: The scented *Shurub* ([Syrup](#)) was often extracted from flowers and rare leaves, by means of using hot [oils](#) and [fat](#), they were later cooled in [cinnamon](#) oil. The oils used were also extracted from [sesame](#) and [olives](#). [Essential oil](#) was produced by joining various retorts, the steam from these retorts condensed, combined and its scented droplets were used as [perfume](#) and mixed to produce the most costly medicines.

### ***Kitāb al-Mughnī fī al-Adwiya al-Mufrada***

Ibn al-Bayṭār's second major work is *Kitāb al-Mughnī fī al-Adwiya al-Mufrada*, كتاب المغني في الأدوية المفردة, an [encyclopedia](#) of [Islamic medicine](#) which incorporates his knowledge of plants used extensively for the treatment of various ailments, including diseases related to the head, ear, eye, etc.<sup>[9]</sup>

### **Other works**

- *Mīzān al-Ṭabīb*. ميزان الطبيب.
- *Risāla fī l-Aghdhiya wa-l-Adwiya*.
- *Maqāla fī al-Laymūn*, *Treatise on the Lemon* (also attributed to Ibn Jumay); translated into Latin by [Andrea Alpago](#) as *Ebn Bitar de malis limonis* (Venice 1593).<sup>[3]</sup>
- *Tafsīr Kitāb Diyāsqūrīdūs*, a commentary on the first four books of [Dioscorides](#) 'Materia Medica'.<sup>[13]</sup>

### **See also**

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- [Islamic science](#)
  - [Islamic medicine](#)
  - [Islamic scholars](#)

### **Notes**

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1. [Alam 1997](#), pp. 6–8.
  2. "The Book of Medicinal and Nutritional Terms" (<https://www.wdl.org/en/item/7466/#q=Ibn+al-Baitar+arab>) . 1800.



3. Vernet 2008.
4. Himes, Norman Edwin (1963). *Medical history of contraception* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=8NdPAQAAIAAJ>) .
5. "The Book of Medicinal and Nutritional Terms" (<https://www.wdl.org/en/item/7466/>) . 1800.
6. Saad & Said 2011.
7. James Riddick Partington (1960). *A history of Greek fire and gunpowder* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=fNZBSqd2cToC&pg=PA22>) (reprint, illustrated ed.). JHU Press. p. 22. ISBN 0-8018-5954-9. "The first definite mention of saltpetre in Arabic language is that in al-Baytar (died 1248), written towards the end of his life, where it is called "snow of China." Al-Baytar was a Spanish Arab, although he travelled a good deal and lived for a time in Egypt."
8. Peter Watson (2006). *Ideas: A History of Thought and Invention, from Fire to Freud* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=CVNoJydnGAoC&pg=PA304>) (illustrated, annotated ed.). HarperCollins. p. 304. ISBN 0-06-093564-2. Retrieved 2011-11-28. "The first use of a metal tube in this context was made around 1280 in the wars between the Song and the Mongols, where a new term, chong, was invented to describe the new horror...Like paper, it reached the West via the Muslims, in this case the writings of the Andalusian botanist Ibn al-Baytar, who died in Damascus in 1248. The Arabic term for saltpetre is 'Chinese snow' while the Persian usage is 'Chinese salt'.28"
9. Russell McNeil, *Ibn al-Bayṭār* (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~mcneil/baitart.htm>) , Malaspina University-College.
10. "Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science, volume 1: Astronomy, Theoretical and Applied, pgs. 271–272. Ed. Roshdi Rasheed. London: Routledge, 1996. ISBN 0415124107
11. *Tafsīr Kitāb Diyāsqūrīdūs*, A commentary of Dioscorides' "Materia Medica," by Abu Muhammad 'Abdallah ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Baytar de Málaga, Beirut 1989 (Arabic)
12. German edition in two volumes, 1840–1842, translated by Sontheimer. French edition in three volumes, 1877–1883, translated by Leclerc.
13. *Tafsīr Kitāb Diyāsqūrīdūs*, – Commentaire de la "Materia Medica" de Dioscoride, by Abu Muhammad 'Abdallah ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Baytar de Málaga, (ed. Ibrahim ben Mrad), Beirut 1989 (Arabic w/ Taxonomic names in English)

## References

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- Alam, Hushang (1997). "EBN AL-BAYṬĀR, ZĪĀ'AL-DĪN ABŪ MOḤAMMAD 'ABD-ALLĀH" (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ebn-al-baytar>) . *Encyclopædia Iranica*. Vol. VIII, Fasc. 1. pp. 6–

8.

- Saad, Bashar; Said, Omar (2011). "3.3" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=-WQVF8nhKf4C&pg=PT68>) . *Greco-Arab and Islamic Herbal Medicine*. West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons. ISBN 9781118002261.
- Vernet, J. (2008) [1970–80]. "Ibn Al-Bayṭār Al-Mālaqī, Ḍiyā' Al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abdillāh Ibn Aḥmad" (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2830900318.html>) . *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*. Encyclopedia.com.